

APO/FPO Absentee Ballot Express Implementation Plan - 2006

Overview

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and the Department of Defense (DoD), which operates the Military Postal Service (MPS), are combining efforts to expedite the delivery of absentee ballots to and from military post offices (APOs/FPOs) overseas for the 2006 General Election. The Postal Service's goal is to assist the Military Postal Service in speeding up the handling of this mail so that all absentee ballots from military service members overseas are counted in this election. The MPS provides postal services to Armed Services personnel, family members, and other DoD personnel authorized to use military post offices in 82 countries worldwide. The US Postal Service is responsible for processing military APO/FPO mail within the United States and dispatching it overseas. Military authorities assume responsibility for mail after it arrives at foreign destinations.

Local election offices are encouraged to mail absentee ballots during September and early October in order to provide sufficient time for APO/FPO ballots to be received by service members deployed overseas, completed, and returned to the local election offices. To ensure that ballots are received in time to be counted, the Postal Service has designed a special handling procedure to expedite delivery and return of the absentee ballots from overseas APOs/FPOs. To support the DoD's efforts to have every military absentee ballot counted in this year's General Election, USPS Postmasters or designees will contact each of the county/local election offices in early September to coordinate the mailing of military APO/FPO absentee ballots.

Once ballots are prepared for mailing by the Registrars, local Post Offices will coordinate the mailing of ballots on a daily basis during a seven-week period that absentee ballots will most likely be mailed (Monday, September 18 through Monday, November 6). The Postal Service will consolidate the APO/FPO ballots at major mail processing centers and expedite the ballots (via Express Mail service) to the three military mail gateways of New York, Miami, and San Francisco where APO/FPO mail is sorted and dispatched overseas. Express Mail pouches containing absentee ballots will be identified by the USPS with specially designed green fluorescent tags marked "Absentee Ballots", in order to make these pouches conspicuous.

During the designated seven-week period, the New York, Miami, and San Francisco International Service Centers (ISC) will sort the ballots to the APO/FPO ZIP Code, and place the ballots in specially marked letter trays providing visibility to ensure ballots are given the highest priority while being transported to their destination.

Overseas, the Military Postal Service will ensure that the ballots are given priority handling at APO/FPO destinations and will make every attempt to deliver them as expeditiously as possible. The MPS will ensure each return ballot is postmarked at the time of mailing and will place balloting materials in specially marked letter trays to ensure they are given priority in transportation back to the USPS gateways.

Local Mailing Procedures

Each local election office should be contacted by a local USPS representative in order to coordinate the mailing of absentee ballots addressed to APOs and FPOs overseas. This initial contact should be made during the period August 25 through September 15, so that the mailing operations can commence on Monday, September 18, if ballots are ready to be mailed by this date. During this initial contact, the local election office should be informed of USPS efforts to provide special handling and to determine the anticipated mailing date(s) of APO/FPO absentee ballots. In addition, the Postal Service should offer to pickup APO/FPO absentee ballots, as well as request the assistance of the election office in separating APO/FPO absentee ballots.

Local election offices will be requested to separate absentee ballots to APO/FPO addresses during this seven-week period from Monday September 18 through Monday November 6.

This separation can be performed in any one of three ways:

1. by the three military state abbreviations (AE, AA, AP);
2. by the first digit of the ZIP Code (0,3,9);
3. by the first three digits of the ZIP Code: 090-099 for AE, 340 for AA, and 962-966 for AP.

Use of facing slips for each bundle is essential for identifying, handling and expediting service. If requested, facing slips can be provided by the Postal Service, or they can be produced using the attached facing slip template.

NOTE: If there is not sufficient volume (less than five pieces) to warrant a separate bundle for each of the three separations, then a mixed bundle may be necessary. This bundle will have a facing slip attached marked "APO/FPO Mixed – Absentee Ballot."

These separations must be maintained and identified with appropriate facing slips consistent with the markings in the examples below (and in the attached facing slip template).

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|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| APO/FPO AE 090 | APO/FPO AA 340 | APO/FPO AP 962 | APO/FPO Mixed |
| Absentee Ballot 090-099 | Absentee Ballot 340 | Absentee Ballot 962-966 | Absentee Ballot |

Local election officials may drop off separated bundles with proper facing slips at local Post Offices if that is part of the standard mailing procedure for election officials. Otherwise, APO/FPO absentee ballots will be picked up from each of the local election offices Monday–Friday according to local arrangements, during the seven-week period from Monday, September 18 through Monday, November 6. Absentee ballots mailed outside of this window will receive normal processing.

Return of Completed Ballots

Recipients of absentee ballots must complete the ballot as required and deposit it back into MPS mail channels. The Military Post Offices (MPOs) will identify and separate the completed absentee ballots that are mailed back to the election offices in the United States from overseas. The MPS will ensure each voted (or completed) ballot envelope is given a proper, legible postmark at the time of mailing. In addition, MPOs will place balloting materials in easily identifiable containers to ensure they are given priority in transportation back to the United States. Once returning ballots arrive at the USPS gateways, they will be given priority processing for delivery to the county election officials.

As a special procedure for ballots that are mailed by absentee voters on or after November 1st, MPOs will employ Express Mail service to expedite each individual ballot to the respective local election office address.

Attachments: Facing Slip Template

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| APO/FPO AE 090 Absentee Ballots 090 – 099 | APO/FPO AA 340 Absentee Ballots 340 |
| APO/FPO AP 962 Absentee Ballots 962 – 966 | APO/FPO MIXED Absentee Ballots |